

Environmental Assessment

for the

**Construction of a New Blair Lakes
Bombing Range Maintenance Complex**

**354th Fighter Wing
Eielson Air Force Base
December 2002**

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**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
and
FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE
for
Construction of the Blair Lakes Range Maintenance Complex**

Introduction

The Air Force started development of the Blair Lakes Range in the early 1970s and has since that time used the range as an important training facility for strafing and bombing practice. In early 1993, the Air Force implemented a 25-year plan to improve the infrastructure at the range. The improvements have resulted in improved range operations and have also lessened the impact of range maintenance activities to the wetlands. Most range activities can now be confined to the all-season roads and target pads.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would result in the construction of a new Range Maintenance Complex at a location 1.5 miles southeast of the existing facility. In addition, a heliport would be constructed near the new facility and a gravel pit access road extended 705-feet. This movement of the facility is being undertaken for two critical reasons. The existing facility is old and in need of major renovation to be able to operate the facility in an efficient manner. The second and overriding reason the facility is proposed for relocation 1.5 miles southeast of its current location is that the manned complex is in the direct approach path of aircraft using the facility for strafing practice. The current configuration creates an unsafe situation for aircraft, range personnel, and facilities.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

There are two alternatives to the Proposed Action. Alternative 1 would construct a new facility at the existing facility location after demolition and removal of the old facility. Alternative 2 would result in the construction of a new facility at the same location as the Proposed Project. The gravel access road would also be extended under this alternative, but the heliport would not be built near the new facility, but collocated with the existing air strip.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would result in the continuation of the current Blair Lakes Range activities and completion of all previously proposed and approved construction.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action

Wetlands

The Proposed Action will disturb 0.6 additional acres of black spruce wetlands. This would result from the construction of a 100-foot by 100-foot heliport pad and the extension of the gravel pit access road by 705 feet.

Fish and Wildlife

None of the activities associated with the Proposed Action will likely result in impacts to fishery resources. Some wildlife may be displaced to adjacent areas by the additional filling of 0.6 acres of wetlands, however it should be quite minimal. The overall impact to fish and wildlife from the Proposed Action is expected to be minor.

Historical or Cultural Resources

Archeological sites have been identified in the 63,100 acre Blair Lakes Range. None of these sites would be impacted by range activities. In the event that historic or cultural sites are discovered during range construction or routine operation and the activities pose a threat to the site, activities will be halted and a professional archeologist will be brought in to evaluate the find.

Mitigation

No mitigation was required by state and federal agencies for any aspect of the proposed work.

Public Comment

No public comments were received from the public noticing of the EA/FONSI/FONPA or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wetlands Permit for this project.

Finding Of No Practicable Alternative: The Blair Lakes Range has been used by the Air Force for bombing and strafing practice for more than 20 years. It is a valuable training facility that will be used for the foreseeable future. Any new range development is likely to impact wetlands because, except for the areas developed by importing fill, the range is entirely wetlands. The Proposed Action will improve the range's infrastructure, reduce equipment damage and down time, and most importantly provide a safer environment for range workers and aircraft using the facility. Taking all the environmental, economic, safety, and other pertinent factors into account, pursuant to Executive Order 11990, and the authority vested in me by the Secretary of the Air Force Order 791.1, I find that there is no practicable alternative to this action and the Proposed Action includes

developed by importing fill, the range is entirely wetlands. The Proposed Action will improve the range's infrastructure, reduce equipment damage and down time, and most importantly provide a safer environment for range workers and aircraft using the facility. Taking all the environmental, economic, safety, and other pertinent factors into account, pursuant to Executive Order 11990, and the authority vested in me by Secretary of the Air Force Order 791.1, I find that there is no practicable alternative to this action and the Proposed Action includes all practical measures to minimize harm to the environment. This decision has been made after taking into account all submitted information and considering a full range of alternatives that are within the legal authority of the Air Force, and which would meet the project requirements.

Finding Of No Significant Impact: Based on the environmental assessment (EA) conducted in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality, and Air Force Instructions, I conclude that construction of a new Blair Lakes Range Maintenance Complex will not result in significant impacts to the environment and that preparation of an environmental impact statement is not warranted.



STEVEN R. POLK
Lieutenant General, USAF
Vice Commander, Pacific Air Forces

6 March 2003

Date

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1.0 Purpose And Need For The Proposed Action

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The existing Blair Lakes Range is a 63,100 acre tract that is part of the 642,215 acre U.S. Army, Ft. Wainwright, Tanana Flats Training Area. The Air Force's Land Use Permit provides them exclusive use of a 33,963 acre portion of the tract, designated R-2211, and joint use of the remaining 29,137. The range is located 26 miles southwest of Eielson Air Force Base (Eielson AFB) and 32 miles due south of Fairbanks. The Ft. Wainwright Range was first activated in 1941 by Executive Order 8847, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt, and amended by Public Land Order 2676. Since then the Army has conducted tank maneuvers, fired artillery, and trained ground forces on this range. The Air Force has used their portion mainly for bombing and strafing practice, and on occasion, live ordnance detonation.

1.1.2 Since December 1990, the number of military aircraft assigned to Alaska has increased approximately 33 percent. The closing of Clark Air Base in the Philippines also made Alaska the closest U.S. controlled tactical flying training area available to PACAF forces and U.S. allies in the Pacific. In addition to Alaska based aircraft, other aircraft are frequently deployed to Alaska to participate in joint/combined training and Major Flying Exercises (MFE). These aircraft may include all types currently in the DoD inventory, as well as similar allied Aircraft. The operational requirements for these aircraft include air-to-ground weapons ranges and use of ground-based threat radar and weapon system simulators. Blair Lakes Range provides the type of training required by these aircraft.

1.1.3 In 1993, Eielson AFB proposed major upgrades to the Blair Lakes Range bombing facility. This included a 25-year plan to reduce wetland, stream, and riparian degradation; to restore natural drainage patterns; and to increase the efficiency and serviceability of the Blair Lakes Range. This was to be accomplished by upgrading 6 miles of target maintenance roads, constructing 0.1 miles of new road, constructing a bridge and installing culverts, upgrading four 320-foot diameter target pads, and constructing a 3,500-foot airstrip that would also function as a road. Two gravel pits were to be developed to provide necessary construction material. The construction of elevated roads and target pads and installation of drainage structures were needed to protect sensitive wetlands from traffic and to reestablish and safeguard natural drainage patterns that had been damaged by routine equipment movement along the existing unimproved roads. Depressions made by traffic had created areas for water to collect and alter natural drainage. Erosion and siltation had also occurred as a result of stream bank damage from maintenance vehicle traffic.

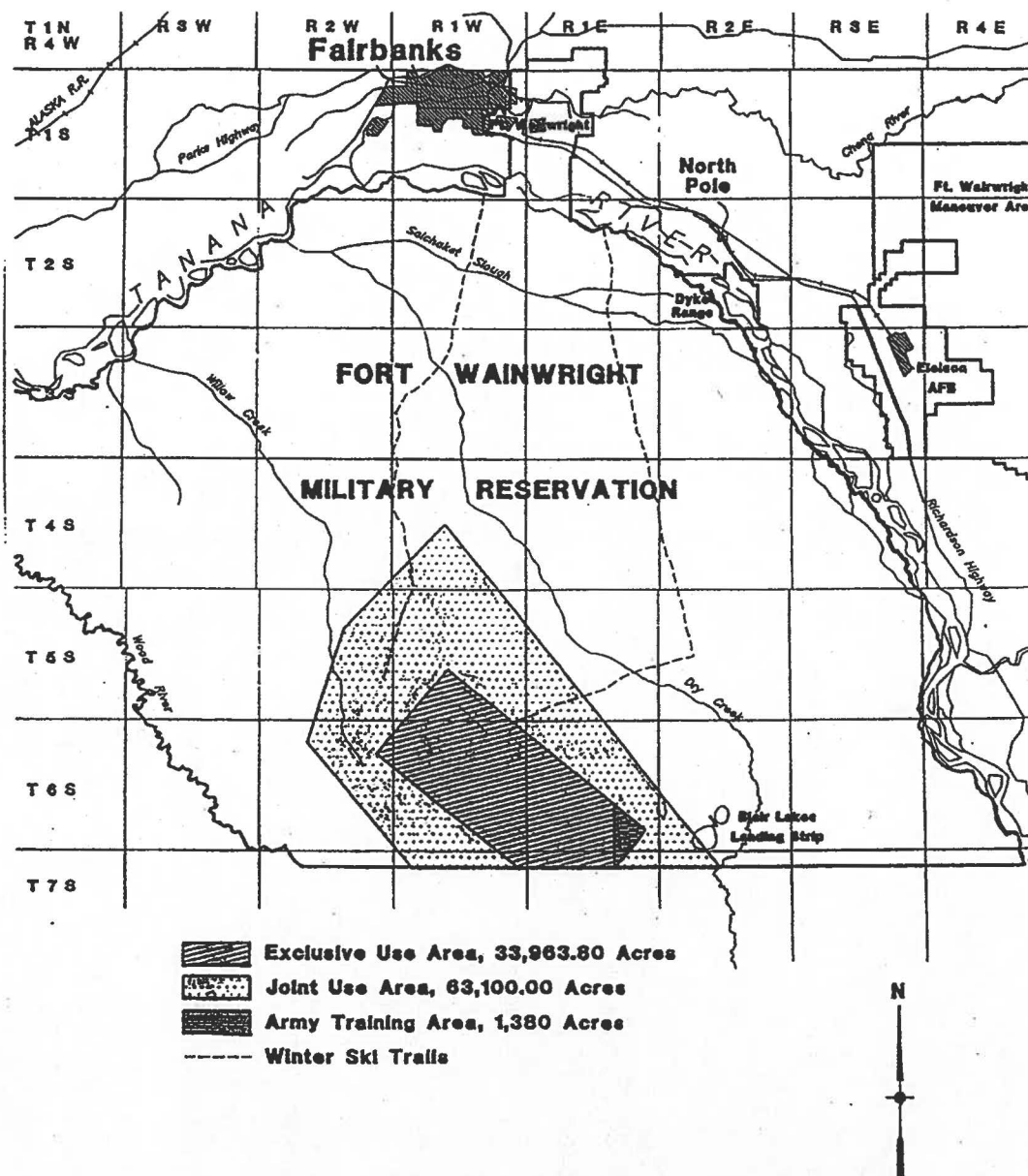


Figure 1 – Location Blair Lakes Range

1.1.4 Upgrades proposed to the Blair Lakes Range in 1993 were initiated in 1994 and have continued during the past seven construction seasons. The new gravel borrow pit was opened, airstrip construction begun, and various other improvements made. Much of the work addressed in the 1993 EA (*Road, Target, and Airstrip Construction At Blair Lakes Range, 25-Year Plan*), was originally intended to mitigate impacts to wetland resources that either had previously occurred, or could occur in the future by operation of the Blair Lakes Bombing Range.

1.1.5 In 2001, because several aspects of the originally proposed work/designs were found to be inadequate or in need of redesign, modifications to the originally proposed work were presented. A wetlands permit was obtained and an

Environmental Assessment (EA) was written that addressed the proposed work. This work included the following:

- (1) Removal of vegetative debris (stumps, logs, parts of trees) from an additional 548 acres of black spruce/scrub shrub wetlands that were burned during a wildfire on the Range in 1980. This brought the total acreage to be cleared to 678 acres (130 acres were cleared as part of the original U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wetlands permit 4-930496). Vegetation removal and minimal leveling helped to provide a smoother surface for motorized mowing that must be done to keep vegetation from obscuring the range targets and to provide firebreaks in the event of future wildfires in the area. Also, it provided better visibility for range clearance of unexploded ordnance that must be undertaken annually. Solid debris generated by the vegetation removal process (stumps and logs) was proposed for placed in a gravel borrow pit originally permitted under Corps of Engineers wetlands permit 4-910478.
- (2) Construction of two 900-foot-long roads to provide access for maintenance of the range lead-in-lights. Lead-in-lights are used to direct pilots to the targets during poor visibility conditions. The two roads were each 450 feet long, 35-foot-wide at the base, 19-foot-wide at the crown, and 4-foot-thick. In addition, the roads would have, at each end, a circular turnaround 66 feet in diameter.
- (3) Repaired or replaced as needed, portions of the 8,488 feet of existing serviceable buried utility lines that service the Blair Lakes Range. To accomplish this, the buried line would have been excavated, repaired or replaced, and then the trench backfilled. In some cases it may have been necessary to add additional material where water saturated soil made reburying the cable difficult.
- (4) If diesel contaminated soil is generated as a result of operational fuel spills, permission was obtained to place such soil on the range airstrip in a manner that would conform to Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) regulations governing land application of contaminated soils.

1.1.6 As part of Eielson AFB's long-range military construction (MILCON) program, funds had been requested for the relocation of the Blair Lakes Range Maintenance Complex. This project had been requested to accomplish several urgently needed objectives. They included the following:

- (1) Move Range Maintenance Complex away from the strafing pits. Currently the facilities are located between two strafing approach paths used by aircraft as they make training runs on the strafing pits, a situation that exposes range personnel and property to unnecessary risks.

- (2) Increase billeting at the complex from 12 to 20 personnel. Current billeting is in the form of 20-year-old trailers that are in need of repair.
- (3) Replace, separate, and enlarge Range Maintenance and Vehicle Maintenance facilities. These facilities are over 30 years old and in need of major renovation.
- (4) Increase and move bulk fuel storage capacity. Fuel storage operational problems continue to plague the facility due to inadequate storage capacity and an outdated fuel transfer system.
- (5) Decommission and demolish unused structures.
- (6) Construct 100-foot by 100-foot heliport adjacent to road north of the new complex.

1.2 Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would result in the construction of a new Range Maintenance Complex at the Blair Lakes Range as detailed in Section 1.1.6. Facility construction would result in the loss of 0.6 acres of wetlands.

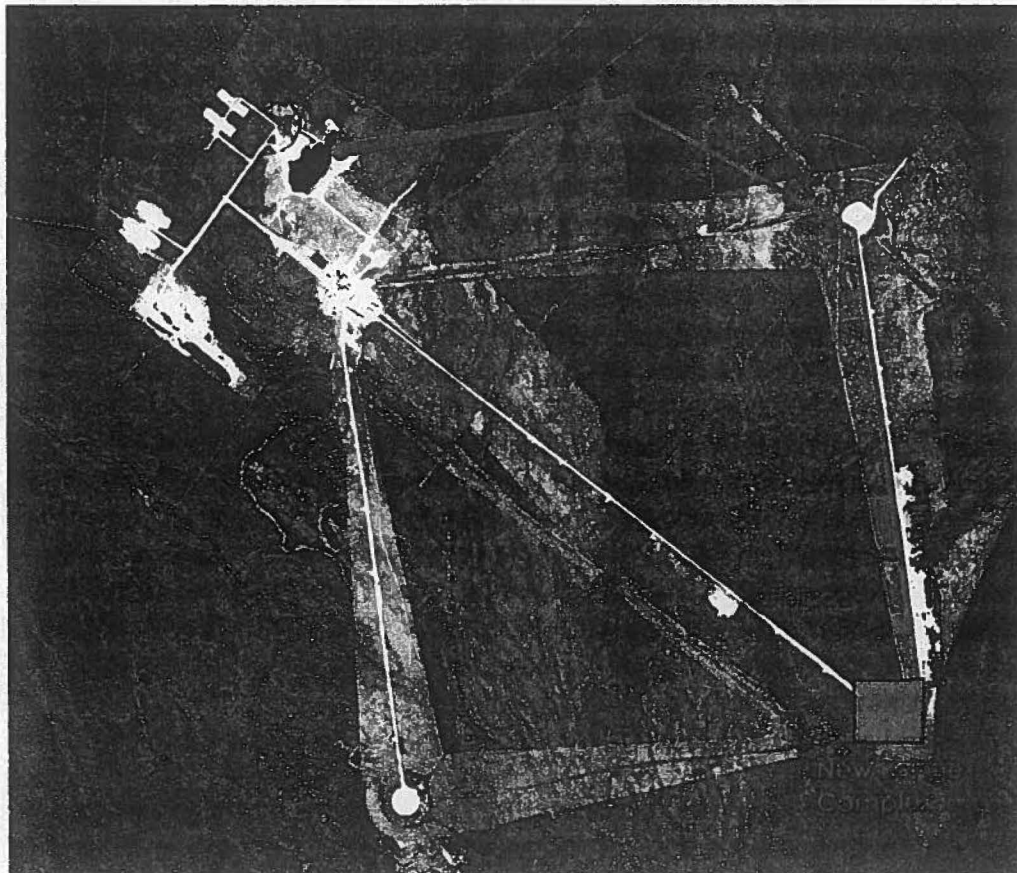


Figure 2 – Proposed Action

1.3 Alternatives to the Proposed Action

1.3.1 The development of alternatives to the Proposed Action for this project presents a rather unique circumstance from the standpoint of trying to provide options for a decision maker and to meet the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) guidelines. The decision to locate the facility at Blair Lakes has been addressed in four different EAs (See Section 1.4 for a list of documents). In the original 1972 EA, alternative locations were considered and it was determined that Blair Lakes was the best location. This decision has been reanalyzed as part of three subsequent NEPA processes. The first EA was prepared to address work proposed to mitigate wetland impacts that had occurred and were likely to continue in the future, if remedial action was not taken and operational procedures were not changed. The second EA was written in response to the need to renew the U.S. Army Land Use Permit that the Air Force must have to operate the facility. The third and fourth EAs were written to address upgrades/improvements that were deemed necessary for the safe and efficient operation of the range complex.

1.3.2 Since the decision to locate and operate the Blair Lakes Range at its current location has been addressed in at least three other NEPA documents, it was decided during scoping meeting discussions that all action alternatives considered for the current project would include continued operations at Blair Lakes. In the past there had been alternatives addressed that would have relocated Blair Lakes Range operations. As the result of each of the NEPA processes, the alternative selected by the decision maker was to leave the facility at its present location. Thus, it was felt that any feasible alternative to the Proposed Action must include continued operations at the current location. Based on this premise, in addition to the Proposed Action, two action alternatives and a No Action Alternative are included for analysis.

Alternative 1: Demolish existing Blair Lakes Range Operations Facility and rebuild on the existing site.

The existing Blair Lakes Range Operations Facility is located on a gravel pad that is situated in the northwest portion of the range complex (see **Figure 3**). This alternative would result in the demolition and removal of all existing buildings and related structures. Once the area is cleared of all debris, a new foundation pad would be constructed, as needed, to ensure that a new facility would have adequate foundation integrity. A new facility would be built on the site according to the design provided for in Section 1.1.6 of this document. This alternative would not result in additional losses of wetland habitat, as all new construction would be on previously impacted gravel fill area.

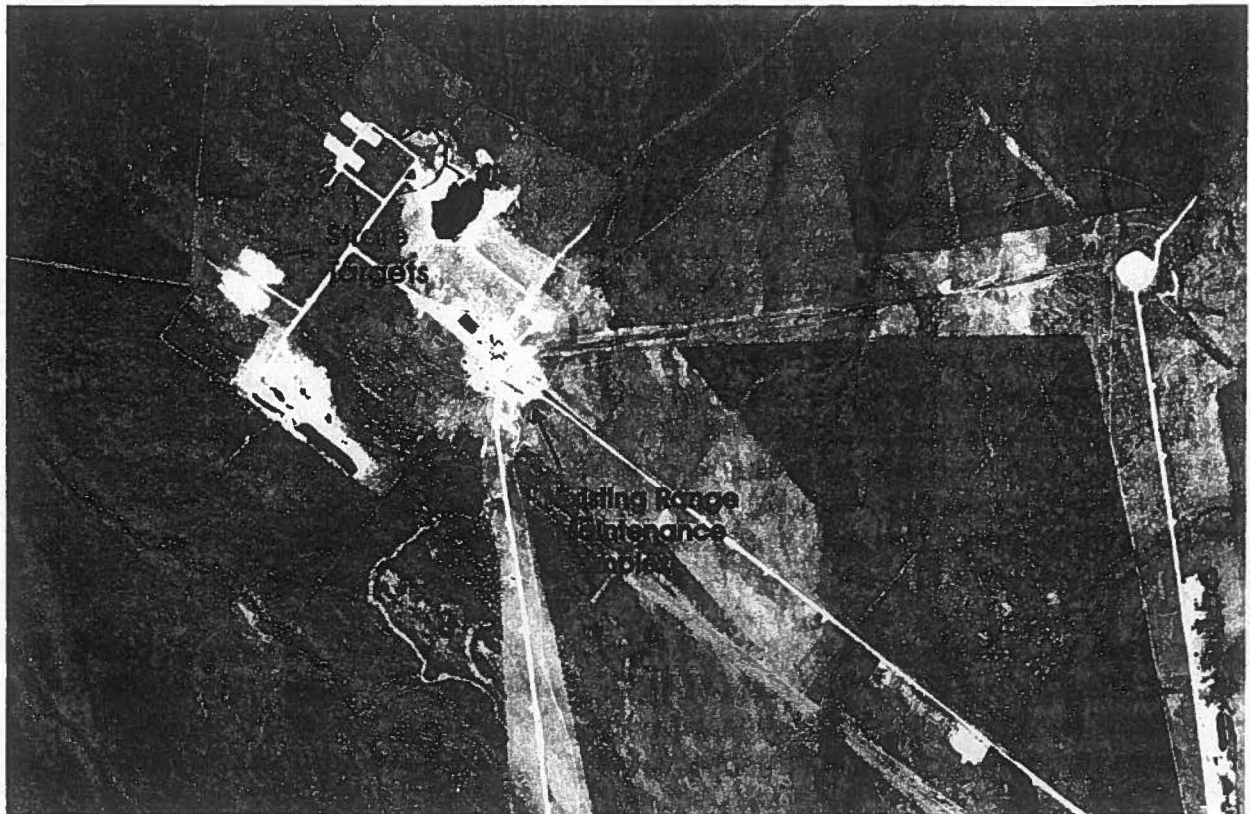


Figure 3 – Alternative 1, Rebuild on Site of Existing Blair Lakes Facility

Alternative 2: Build a new Range Maintenance Facility adjacent to the rear flank tower, 1.5 miles southwest of the existing site, and incorporate a heliport into the existing landing strip.

This alternative would be similar to the Proposed Action (**Section 1.1.6 and Figure 2**), except no additional wetland fill would be used for construction of a heliport. It would be incorporated into the southeast end of the existing airstrip and reduce the overall footprint of the new project by 0.22 acres. This would also result in 0.22 acres less wetland loss as a result of project construction.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative the Range Maintenance Complex would not be rebuilt and no additional work beyond what has already been permitted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be conducted at Blair Lakes Range.

1.4 Other Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) And EAs That Influence This EA

As stated previously, there have been several EIS's and EA's that have addressed issues relating to the construction and operation of Blair Lakes Range. Most, if not all, issues that were listed during the scoping process for the

currently proposed work at Blair Lakes Range have been identified and thoroughly addressed in one or more of the NEPA documents listed below. For this reason, the analysis of environmental impacts for the currently proposed work will reference and tier to these documents.

1.4.1 Final Environmental Statement on Air Force Blair Lakes Range Operations, 1972. This document was intended to comply with NEPA when the Blair Lakes project was first proposed in 1969; however, the document was not distributed to interested agencies and the public until December of 1972, after which the initial range facility was constructed. In addition, there was no signed decision document (FONSI for an EA, Record of Decision for an EIS) prepared, and without this, the NEPA requirements would not be met. Based upon this lack of complete NEPA documentation, it was decided to write an EA that fully addresses all activities that have occurred at Blair Lakes so that current and future decision requirements can be based on a complete assessment of facts and issues.

1.4.2 Ft Wainwright, Resource Management Plan and Final EIS, U.S.D.I., Bureau of Land Management, 1989. This document provides a summary of alternate resource management plans for the Ft. Wainwright, Yukon Maneuver Area. Similar management approaches are used for these lands as are used for other BLM/Army managed lands such as the Blair Lakes area.

1.4.3 Ft Greely, Proposed Resource Management Plan and Final EIS, U.S.D.I., Bureau of Land Management, 1989. This document provides a series of options for resource management of the Ft. Greely Maneuver Area. Part of this area is the proposed location, in Alternative 1 of this EA, for the establishment of a bombing range similar to the one that presently exists at Blair Lakes Range. Issues addressed, as part of this management plan would also relate, in some respects, to those issues that must be considered if a new bombing range were to be located in the Ft. Greely Maneuver area.

1.4.4 Environmental Assessment of the Proposed Conversion to F-16C/D Squadron, Eielson AFB, AK, 1991. In 1991, this EA was written to assess the impacts of converting A-10 aircraft, then currently assigned to Eielson AFB, to F-16 C/D aircraft. Issues associated with this conversion were addressed including airspace, socioeconomic impacts, aircraft noise, and military manning. The decision to do the conversion was based, in part, on having access to a bombing range similar to Blair Lakes Range.

1.4.5 Environmental Assessment of the Upgrade of Target Arrays on Ft. Wainright and Ft Greely, Alaska, 11th Air Force, 1992. This EA assesses the environmental consequences associated with establishing new target arrays and a mock airfield on the Oklahoma Impact Area at Ft. Greely.

1.4.6 *Yukon Measurement and Debriefing System, Environmental Assessment, 11th Air Force, 1993.* To upgrade training opportunities for the 354th Fighter Wing at Eielson AFB, an Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation (ACMI) system was proposed for the Ft. Wainwright and Yukon Ranges. This system is also intended to support large force exercises and joint training events for DOD combat aircrews. Portions of this system are located immediately adjacent to the Blair Lakes facility (Site WR-3). Aspects of the process of locating this system at this site provides some baseline assessment for the operation of Blair Lakes Range.

1.4.7 *Eielson Air Force Base Operable Unit 1-Declaration of the Record of Decision, 1995.* Blair Lakes in the vicinity of the operations center, was identified as a contaminated site during investigative studies conducted in the 1980's as part of the Environmental Restoration Program (ERP). Five Source Areas (SS50-SS53 and DP54) were delineated and addressed under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). As part of this program extensive investigative studies were conducted, remedial action design was proposed, and remedial actions were initiated. This document provides some of the most in-depth assessment of impacts attributed to operation of Blair Lakes Range that have been documented. As part of the CERCLA process a wide variety of federal, state, local and public input and review was solicited during the development of this document.

1.4.8 *Alaska Military Operations Areas-Environmental Impact Statement, 11th Air Force, 1995.* This EIS was prepared to address the environmental impacts of restructuring the Air Force Special Use Airspace in Alaska. The document assesses several issues pertinent to the operation of Blair Lakes Range, including airspace management, biological resources, recreational resources, subsistence, land use, air quality, and noise as they relate to operation of military aircraft.

1.4.9 *Road, Target Pad, and Airstrip Construction at Blair Lakes Range (25-Year Plan), 1993.* This EA addressed a wide array of improvements that were needed to improve operational aspects of the range, as well as repair previously impacted wetlands and avoid future impacts that could occur if actions were not taken. The proposed work was part of a 25-year plan to upgrade Blair Lakes Range.

1.4.10 *Renewal of Blair Lakes Bombing and Gunnery Range Permit, Ft. Wainwright Maneuver Area, Alaska, 1996.* This detailed assessment was written to address the need for a renewal of the Army Land Use Permit required for operation of the facility.

1.4.11 *Blair Lakes Range Upgrade, 1999.* In early 1993, the Air Force implemented a 25-year plan to improve the infrastructure at the range. The improvements have resulted in improved range operations and have also

lessened the impact of range maintenance activities to the wetlands. Most range activities can now be confined to the all-season roads and target pads. This EA was done to address work needed to modify or improve previously proposed work.

1.5 Decision to be Made

1.5.1 As required by Air Force Instruction 32-7061, an *Environmental Impact Analysis Process* (EIAP) must be completed to determine what are the environmental consequences of the proposed upgrade and relocation of the Range Maintenance Complex at Blair Lakes. The completion of this EA is intended to satisfy these requirements. The Proposed Action and all alternatives listed in Section 1.3 will be addressed in detail in Chapter 2.0 of this document. A description of the resources involved with each alternative is provided in Chapter 3.0, and the impacts that could result from each one are discussed in Chapter 4.0.

1.5.2 The EA, a draft FONSI (if applicable), and all other appropriate planning documents will be provided to the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Vice Commander, the decision maker, for review and consideration. If, based on a review by the decision maker of all pertinent information, a FONSI is proposed, a notice of intent (NOI) will be published in accordance with 40 CFR 1506.6. All interested parties will have 30 days to comment on the decision to the Air Force. If, at the end of the 30-day public comment period, no substantive comments are received, the decision maker will sign the FONSI.

1.5.3 Two Executive Orders (EOs), 11988 (Floodplain Management) and 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), require the heads of federal agencies to find that there is no practicable alternative before the agency takes certain actions impacting wetlands or floodplains. To address this requirement, the Secretary of the Air Force's designated agent, HQ PACAF/CV will sign a document that addresses the issues of wetlands and floodplains that may be associated with actions the Air Force proposes to take. This document, known as a Finding Of No Practicable Alternative (FONPA) will state which alternative, the Proposed Action, Alternative 1, or the No Action Alternative will be selected as the appropriate course of action. The FONPA will be combined with the FONSI into one document. It will contain documentation that all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands and/or floodplains has been taken, and that all appropriate mitigation will be incorporated into the project design or otherwise authorized.

1.6 Project Scoping/Significant Issues

This section provides a summary of issues identified during the scoping process.

1.6.1 A scoping meeting for this EA was held on September 3, 2002 at the Eielson AFB Civil Engineering Offices and was attended by personnel from Eielson Range Maintenance, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Eielson Environmental Flight personnel, and Alaska Caledonia Environmental Services. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and ADEC declined invitations to the meeting.

1.6.2 The following summarizes issues that were identified during the scoping process relating to road upgrades and construction:

- Subsidence due to permafrost disturbance.
- Disturbance of wetland vegetation.
- Erosion and siltation.
- Alteration of surface drainage patterns.

1.6.3 It was noted by many attending the scoping meeting that these issues were similar, if not the same, as those raised for previous work proposed at Blair Lakes Range. These issues and concerns have been addressed in previously written environmental assessments and the time since implementation of the previous projects has been long enough that actual circumstances can be observed and impacts recorded. This EA will rely on referencing these circumstances where applicable.

1.7 Federal and State Permits or Licenses Needed for Project Implementation. A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 wetlands permit is needed for this project. In addition, a wastewater and drinking water system design approval from Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation will be required. The 354th Civil Engineer Squadron will obtain these permits.

2.0 Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

Chapter 2 provides a description of alternatives considered to achieve the purpose and need described in Chapter 1 for the upgrade of facilities at Blair Lakes Bombing Range.

2.1 Criteria Used to Develop Alternatives

2.1.1 In Section 1.3 of this document it was noted that development of alternatives to the Proposed Action would be guided by circumstances and requirements that had been developed in conjunction with previous work accomplished at Blair Lakes Bombing Range. These include the following:

- (1) The 1993 EA, titled *Road, Target Pad, and Airstrip Construction at Blair Lakes Range (25-Year Plan)*, addressed the work that was proposed to mitigate wetland impacts through construction of new facilities and operational improvements. Aspects of these proposals were driven by requirements the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state and federal resource agencies were requiring the Air Force to do to mitigate previous wetland impacts at the Blair Lakes Facility. Although this work will be phased over several years, work has been started, and new roads, bridges, and other facilities have been constructed. To meet regulatory requirements, any new work proposed should fit conceptually with the approach that was established in the 1993 25-Year Plan for Blair Lakes.
- (2) Continued operation of Blair Lakes Bombing Range as an Air Force aircraft training facility is critical to the mission of Eielson AFB. There are no other manned ranges in Alaska that provides Air Force pilots with the type of training available at Blair Lakes. All alternatives considered must have, as a component, continued operation of Blair Lakes.
- (3) Except for the areas already built up as part of facility construction, Blair Lakes Range is 100 percent wetlands. This causes any new construction of additional facilities to result in the filling of wetlands.
- (4) Blair Lakes Bombing Range provides Air Force aircraft with training in low level bombing and strafing. Currently the range facility is configured such that planes using the range for bombing and strafing must fly directly overhead the range maintenance complex at low-levels, including a dormitory that houses range personnel. Although, to date, no injuries have occurred as a result of this situation, there is a high likelihood that it could happen, creating an unacceptable risk to range personnel. In addition, damage to facilities has occurred as a result to this close proximity of range facility structures to target areas.

2.1.2 Alternatives have been identified and developed by relating the purpose and objectives stated in Section 1.2 with the criteria presented in Section 2.1. As part of the project scoping process, a discussion of viable alternatives was conducted. This process has resulted in, for the purpose of this EA, an analysis of the Proposed Action, two action alternatives, and a No Action Alternative.

2.2 Proposed Action – Construct a new Range Maintenance Complex at the rear flank tower, 1.5 miles southwest of the existing site.

2.2.1 The Proposed Action would address several critical problems that currently exist at the Blair Lakes Range Facility. The proposed work and why they are being proposed is as follows:

- (1) Move Range Maintenance Complex away from the strafing pits. Currently the facilities are located between two strafing approach paths used by aircraft as they make training runs on the strafing pits, a situation that exposes range personnel and property to unnecessary risks.
- (2) Increase billeting at the complex from 12 to 20 personnel. Current billeting is in the form of 20-year-old trailers that are in need of repair.
- (3) Replace, separate, and enlarge Range Maintenance and Vehicle Maintenance facilities. These facilities are over 30 years old and in need of major renovation.
- (4) Increase and move bulk fuel storage capacity. Fuel storage operational problems continue to plague the facility due to inadequate storage capacity and an outdated fuel transfer system.
- (5) Decommission and demolish unused structures.
- (6) Construct 100-foot by 100-foot heliport adjacent to road north of the new complex.

2.2.2 As discussed in Section 1.1.5, extensive pad, road, and gravel pit development at the Blair Lakes Bombing Range had been proposed, permitted and, to some extent, constructed. The only additional construction work required that was not included in the previously permitted wetland fill permits and EAs is the 100-foot by 100-foot heliport and a 705-foot extension of the gravel pit access road (see **Figure 2-1**). This would result in the placement of an additional 4,128 cubic yards of gravel in 0.6 acres of black spruce wetlands.

2.2.3 All gravel materials required for facility construction will be extracted from the gravel borrow pit located at the Blair Lakes Range.

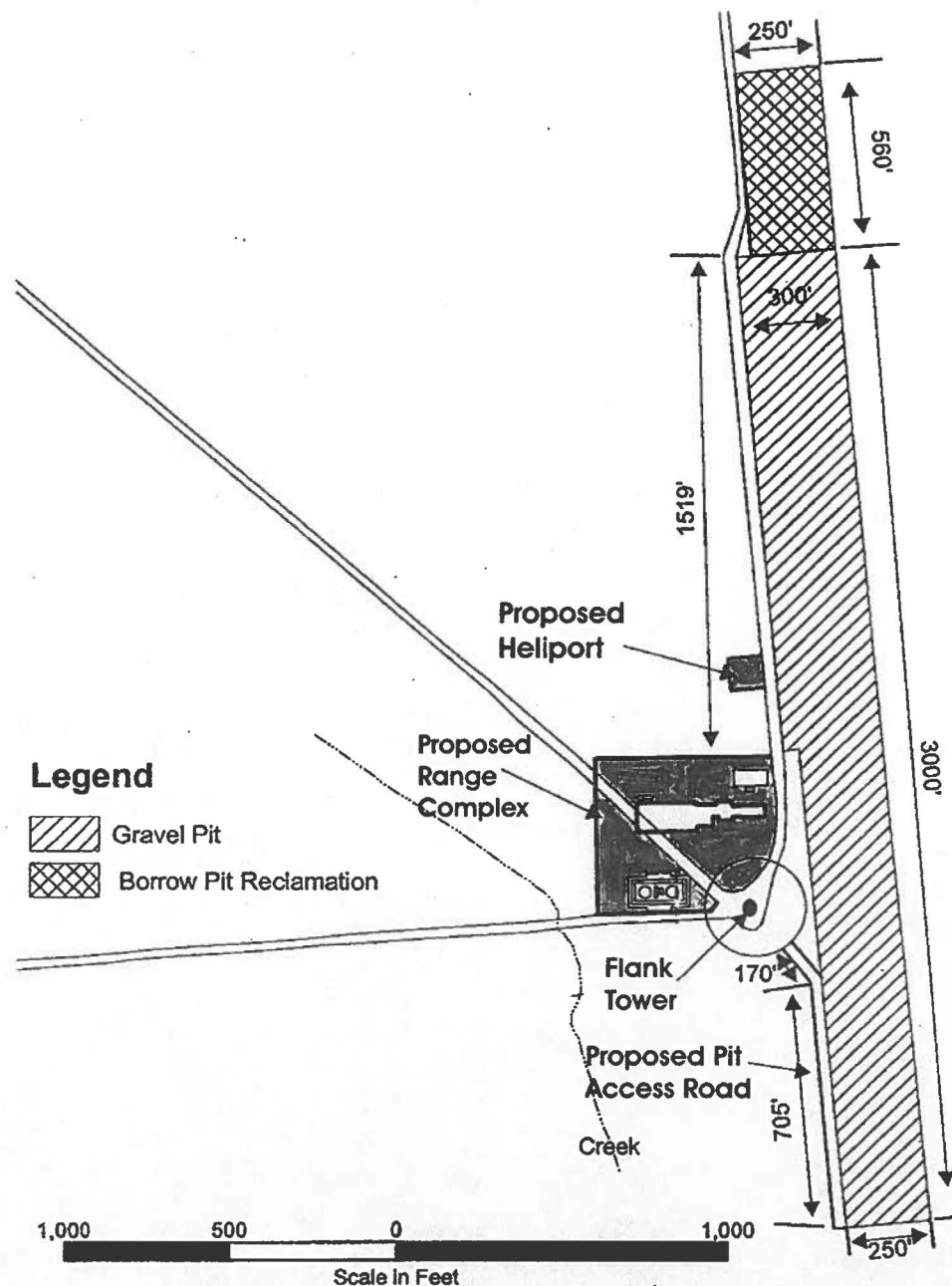


Figure 2-1 –

2.3 Alternative 1 - Demolish existing Blair Lakes Range Operations Facility and rebuild on the existing site.

2.3.1 The existing Blair Lakes Range Operations Facility is located on a gravel pad that is situated in the northwest portion of the range complex. This alternative would result in the demolition and removal of all existing buildings and related structures. Once the area is cleared of all debris, a new foundation pad

would be constructed, as needed, to ensure that a new facility would have adequate foundation integrity.

2.3.2 A new facility would be built on the site according to the design provided for in Section 1.1.6 of this document. This alternative would not result in additional loss of wetland habitat, as all new construction would be on previously impacted gravel fill area.

2.3.3 This alternative does not, however, address one of the major issues that was identified as needing improvement at the existing Blair Lakes Facility, the need to shift the location of facilities out of the direct path of aircraft using the strafing pits. Aircraft approaching the strafe pits for target practice currently must fly at very low altitudes directly overhead of the manned facility. This results in a higher than acceptable risk to range personnel and structures such as fuel tanks.

2.4 Alternative 2 - Build a new Range Maintenance Facility adjacent to the rear flank tower, 1.5 miles southwest of the existing site, and incorporate a heliport into the existing landing strip.

Activities associated with this alternative would be similar to those discussed for the Proposed Action, except no additional wetland fill would be used for construction of a heliport. It would be incorporated into the southeast end of the existing airstrip and reduce the overall footprint of the new project by 0.22 acres. This would also result in 0.22 acres less wetland loss as a result of project construction.

2.5 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would result in no new construction at Blair Lakes Range other than that previously proposed and permitted under wetlands permits and for which an EA has been completed.

3.0 Affected Environment

This section of the EA presents a description of the physical, biological, and cultural resources that currently exist in the areas of potential impact as delineated by the Blair Lakes Range.

3.1 Physical Resources

The Blair Lakes Range (Exclusive Use Area), is a rectangular shaped tract, 33,964 acres in size. It is located in the Tanana Flats region of Interior Alaska. It is situated approximately 50 miles north of the Alaska Range and south and west of the course of the Tanana River. The Wood River lies just west of the Range's western boundary. Topographically, the Blair Lakes Range is a gently rolling glacial outwash that slopes slightly to the northwest. The range itself has little topographic relief. Occasional hills or buttes occur in the vicinity with elevations of 1,250 to 1,400 feet. The elevation of most of the range's land, however, is between 500 and 650 feet.

3.1.1 Geology/Soils

3.1.1.1 The geology and soils of the Blair Lakes Range is relatively uniform. In areas undisturbed by development activities, the land can be characterized as having a top layer of 6 to 12 inches of fibrous peat underlain by 2.5 to 3.0 meters of variably thick layers of fine grained silt, sandy silt, silty clay, and gravely sandy silt. These various grain types occur as lenses and layers, 0.5 to 2.0 meters thick. Gravel layers up to 1-meter thick may also be present, especially near the surface. Most of the developed portion of the facility is built up on gravel extracted from the site. Due to the fact that the Blair Lakes Range Facility is currently upgrading existing roads, target pads, and stream crossings, and constructing new roads, and a gravel pit, the exact number of acres covered by gravel fill is changing on a continuing basis.

3.1.1.2 Detailed soil profiles are not available for the Blair Lakes areas except in selected areas where investigative studies performed by the CERCLA program was required. Profiles of these surveys are provided in the *Remedial Investigation Report, Environmental Restoration Program OU1*.

3.1.1.3 Permafrost is a dominant physical feature of soils in the Blair Lakes Range. It generally varies in depth in undisturbed portions of the range from 2-9 meters. Permafrost depth studies using an electromagnetic sounding device (FDEM), indicated that the depth to the top of the permafrost varied greatly in the developed portion of the site and is closest to the surface on the east side of the building complex. Variable permafrost depth may be the result of several factors including variability in ground cover (vegetation in summer, snow in winter), sediment grain size distribution, and artificial heat sources that create thaw bulbs

associated with facility structures such as the septic pond. The permafrost extends to a depth of up to 100 feet in some areas.

3.1.2 Water Resources

3.1.2.1 Surface Water: Surface water exists in the form of a network of small, low gradient streams that have seasonal variations in flow and generally freeze up in the fall. This network of streams mainly feed Clear and Willow Creeks which flow to the northwest to join the Tanana River. Occasionally, where the permafrost is close enough to the surface and water table perched high enough, small ponds will form which may be seasonally persistent. The only lakes of any size are the Blair Lakes that are just off of the impact area on its southeast corner.

3.1.2.2 Groundwater: Due to the presence of permafrost in the area, perched water table conditions exist in many portions of the range, contributing to seasonally persistent moist or saturated soil conditions and classifying them technically as wetlands. Unconfined aquifer conditions exist wherever saturated alluvial deposits occur above the permafrost layer. Groundwater movement is generally in a north/northwest direction, and permafrost appears to act as a confining layer to the deeper alluvial aquifer that is the source of the facility's water supply well.

3.1.2.3 Wetlands and Floodplains: Wetlands comprise 99.7 percent of Blair Lakes Range. The unmaintained portion of the range is mostly black spruce wetlands. The dominant specie is black spruce, and is typically 15 to 30 feet tall and 4 to 5 inches in diameter. Paper birch and alder are abundant along watercourses. Three thousand acres maintained by mowing or hydro-axing. Brush control keeps this area in an early stage of plant succession.

About 1.4 percent of the Blair Lakes Range is within the 100-year floodplain. There are no 100-year floodplains in the maintained portion of the range.

3.1.3 Noise

3.1.3.1 Noise is defined as a small-scale fluctuation of air pressure that typically follows a repetitive pattern. Noise can cause behavioral patterns in both humans and wildlife. Sound levels are measured in decibels (dBA). The threshold of human hearing is 0 dBA. Typical dBA of various noise sources are as follows:

Threshold of Hearing	0 dBA
Background Noise for Wilderness Areas	30-50 dBA
Level above which hearing or behavior may be affected	65 dBA
Jet Takeoff	120 dBA

3.1.3.2 Aircraft generate by far the most noise on at Blair Lakes Range. Noise levels associated with aircraft during flying hours can exceed 80 decibels (dB) in the vicinity of the range facility. A 65-dB level or higher is not recommended for housing areas by EPA standards (Noise Effects Handbook, US EPA, 1981). Construction noise is potentially another source of noise, but it is not considered to be a concern due to its temporary nature and relatively low dB level. When aircraft are not flying in the vicinity of the Blair Lakes Range, background decibel levels are well below 65-dBA.

3.2 Biological Resources

3.2.1 Vegetation

The 33,963-acre Blair Lakes Range Exclusive use area exhibits considerable variation in plant community types. This can be attributed to the fact that surface water and its associated drainage patterns provide a wide range of soil moisture conditions. The poorly drained areas are dominated by an overstory of black spruce and tamarack. Understory vegetation includes Labrador tea, resin birch, dwarf arctic birch, and willow. Large portions of these areas (more than 15,000 acres) are in a post-fire successional plant community, resulting from at least two fires occurring in the last 15 years. Interspersing these black spruce forests are wet meadows of herbaceous graminoid communities, dominated by water sedge, scattered green alder, resin birch, and willow. These areas often contain seasonally persistent water bodies. Along stream courses (Willow and Dry Creek, and tributaries) soils are slightly better drained, overstories of mature paper birch mixed with larger black spruce dominate. Understories in these areas include willow, green alder, water sedge, and blue joint grass. To the immediate east of the southeast corner of the range, a series of hills rise up 500 feet above the valley floor. In this area of well-drained soils, broadleaf forests of paper birch and quaking aspen occur. The other dominant vegetative feature of the Range is the areas associated with the Range targets, an area approximately 3,000 acres in size that has been hydro-axed. This area is maintained in an early successional stage of mostly black spruce, labrador tea, resin birch, and willow (10 to 40-inches-tall). The hydro axing is required as part of range operation.

3.2.2 Wildlife

3.2.2.1 Detailed wildlife inventories of the Blair Lakes Range have not been conducted. What information is provided is the result of anecdotal observations made on an irregular basis by Eielson AFB Range and Natural Resources personnel.

3.2.2.2 Primary wildlife species that utilize the non hydro-axed black spruce wetlands include black bear, red squirrel, marten, spruce grouse, and wolves. Moose will use the areas, but usually in association with movements between

more preferred habitat. The hydro-axed portion of the range is preferred by moose and also used by snowshoe hare and fox. Although caribou do not typically use the area, established adjoining caribou ranges could be extended into the Blair Lakes Range if conditions changed in the existing ranges.

3.2.2.3 Because Blair Lakes is largely wetlands and contains seasonally persistent water bodies, the habitat is attractive to birds, particularly waterfowl. Bird surveys were conducted in 1992 and 1993 as part of the Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) monitoring at the Blair Lakes Facility. The habitats observed for recording bird numbers were, for the most part, man-made structures (gravel pit, sewage lagoon). It was felt that birds observed in the area is indicative of what species likely use naturally occurring habitat adjacent to the facility such as ponds and sloughs associated with wet meadows. The surveys were conducted by counting use-days for both individual species (Canada geese, sandhill crane) and collective species (ducks, gulls).

3.2.3 Fishery Resources

Surveys of fish populations in streams associated with the Exclusive Use portion of Blair Lakes have not been done. In 1975, when wetland permits were requested for construction of facilities at Blair Lakes, ADF&G stated that they felt, that Clear Creek, a stream that flows through the area, may have a resident grayling population. For this reason they required the proposed crossing of this stream be by bridge rather than a culvert. It is also possible that Northern Pike may use the stream during summer months.

3.2.4 Endangered Species

No threatened or endangered animal species, as designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are known to occur in the Proposed Action area. This is based on the conclusion of an Eielson AFB contract study that addressed the potential for the presence of endangered species on base lands (Biological Survey, Final Report 1994). The American peregrine falcon, which was recently removed from the list of threatened species, is known to migrate through the area.

3.3 Cultural Resources

3.3.1 In 1984, as part of the development of a *Historic Preservation Plan (HPP)* for Army lands in the state of Alaska, the U.S. Army conducted a detailed inventory of all archeological and historic sites contained on their lands. Included in this survey was the Blair Lakes Range Exclusive Use Area, which had received an initial survey in 1973 as part of an Eielson AFB site evaluation for the original Blair Lakes Range construction project. Information collected during this investigation was revisited and incorporated into the Army *HPP*.

3.3.2 Blair Lakes Range has 18 documented archeological sites. All but one of these, however, is located outside of the Exclusive Use Area and not subject to disturbance by Air Force range activities. The one location that is within the facility boundary, is just inside the southeast perimeter, and is probably not subject to disturbance because of its proximity to the range facility. The remaining 17 are located in association with the three "Blair Lakes" that are to the east of the Exclusive Use Area. Six of these sites have been declared "eligible" for the *National Registry of Historic Places*. They are, for the most part, undisturbed multicomponent prehistoric sites containing remains from such periods as Denali, Historic, late Prehistoric, Athabascan, and Northern Archaic. Responsibility for protection of all of the Blair Lakes sites belongs to the U.S. Army.

3.4 Recreational Resources

3.4.1 The Blair Lakes Range has been in operation for 23 years and during that time recreational use of the area has been restricted due to its exclusive use designation. Prior to 1973, ADF&G's estimated recreational use of the area was only light to moderate by moose hunters and trappers. There is a small landing strip just outside of the Exclusive Use Area that is located adjacent to one of the Blair Lakes. It does get use during both the summer and winter, providing some access to surrounding areas. During the winter, snow machines also occasionally use the unrestricted areas adjacent to the Exclusive Use Area.

3.4.2 Although surface use of the Blair Lakes Exclusive Use Area is totally restricted, airspace is not. Airspace is restricted during periods of scheduled training, and then only at certain altitudes. During non-training periods, airspace is not restricted.

3.5 Subsistence Resources

3.5.1 The Blair Lakes Range is located in the Ft. Wainwright Tanana Flats Training Area and is within the historic subsistence ranges of two lower Tanana bands. These bands include the Chena and Salcha native groups. The Chena natives utilized northern portions of the Yukon Training Area within the Chena River drainage and the Salcha natives the areas associated with the Salcha River drainage. Blair Lakes is positioned in between these two regions and thus did not get heavy use by either group.

3.5.2 Since 1980, native and non-native subsistence uses on Federal public lands in Alaska, including the withdrawal lands, have been regulated by Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Under ANILCA, rights established through customary and traditional subsistence uses determines subsistence use of specific land. No requests under ANILCA have been made for subsistence use of lands associated with the Blair Lakes Range. Thus it is felt that these lands do not represent preferred subsistence use land.

4.0 Environmental Consequences

This chapter discusses the probable impacts for each alternative described in Chapter 2. This discussion will provide the scientific and analytic basis for comparison of the alternatives and will be presented in the sequence they were described in Chapter 3.

4.1 Physical Resources

4.1.1 Soils/Geology

4.1.1.1 Proposed Action

4.1.1.1.1 As described in Section 3.1.2.3 of this EA, permafrost is a dominant physical feature of the Blair Lakes Facility. Range activities have altered the depth of the permafrost, which has in turn impacted some land. Prior to the 1993 project to create all season roads and target pads, much of the surface travel was on tundra trails and the target areas were cleared areas in the tundra. Summer activities disturbed the surface reducing the insulating properties of the organic mat. Some thermokarsting occurred along trails and target pads, evidenced by slumping of tundra and occasional ponding in summer. The work started in 1994 was, in large part, intended to address these impacts. Activities associated with the currently proposed modifications included in the Proposed Action would continue the establishment of permanent, all-weather roads and pads that will significantly reduce the occurrence of thermokarst related impacts.

4.1.1.1.2 One aspect of activities at Blair Lakes Range that has altered the geology and soils of a portion of the area that has been developed, is the removal of surface soils, the exposure of gravel lenses, and the subsequent mining of the gravel. The overburden is placed adjacent to the gravel pits and gravel is extracted for use as construction material for facility pads and roads. This process will continue until the 25-Year Plan for improvements at Blair Lakes Range is complete.

4.1.1.1.3 The proposed construction of a heliport and the extension of an existing access road will have some impact on soils in the area. Approximately 4,128 cubic yards of gravel will be placed in 0.6 acres of black spruce wetlands. As part of this process, existing soils will be covered by a four-foot-layer of pit run gravel to create the heliport pad and the gravel pit access road. This gravel will be mined from the nearby gravel borrow pit.

4.1.1.2 Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would result in no new alterations of undisturbed native soils. An existing gravel pad would be reused once the old facility was demolished and

cleared. In some places, where the pad was less than 4 feet in depth, or did not provide necessary structural stability, additional gravel would be added.

4.1.1.3 Alternative 2

This alternative would result in similar impacts as the Proposed Action, except that 0.27 acres less wetlands would be filled as the result of combining the heliport with the existing air strip. This alternative would result in the filling of only 0.37 additional acres of undisturbed wetlands, decreasing the acres of natural soil horizons that would be altered.

4.1.1.4 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would result in no additional impacts to soil beyond that which would result from activities authorized by previous wetlands permits and addressed in previous EAs (see **Section 1.4**).

4.1.2 Surface Water and Groundwater Resources

4.1.2.1 Proposed Action

4.1.2.1.1 Activities associated with the Proposed Action have some potential to impact surface water resources at the Blair Lakes Range. Certainly past activities and operational practices at the range have resulted in significant alteration of natural drainage patterns. Ruts from vehicle traffic on the tundra and at stream crossings have caused ponding and altered surface water flow. One of the major reasons for developing the 25-Year Plan for Blair Lakes was to address these impacts. Ongoing work provided for in this plan will continue to address these impacts. The work proposed as part of the Proposed Action will also contribute to this management goal and will likely have an overall beneficial impact on surface water resources.

4.1.2.1.2 Activities anticipated as part of the Proposed Action require the use of large earth moving equipment. Operation of this type of equipment always has the potential for spills of petroleum products associated with fueling and maintenance. If routine best management practices are used, these types of impacts would be minimal. In addition, the range has on-site, spill cleanup capability in the event of an accident.

4.1.2.1.3 There is the likelihood of localized temporary increases in surface water turbidity and siltation as a result of the use of earth moving equipment to construct roads, facility pads, and extract gravel. These impacts will be very localized and, to the extent possible, the use of construction best management practices (silt fences, cofferdams) should minimize these impacts.

4.1.2.1.4 Impacts to groundwater are not anticipated as a result of activities associated with the Proposed Action.

4.1.2.2 Alternative 1

4.1.2.2.1 Alternative 1 has limited potential for impacts to surface water since little or no new gravel would be extracted and placed as part of facility construction on the existing facility site.

4.1.2.2.2 No impacts to groundwater are anticipated with work proposed under this alternative.

4.1.2.3 No Action Alternative

No additional impacts to surface or groundwater would occur. Work that was proposed as part of the 1999 Blair Lakes Range improvements would still be completed, as well as all work proposed in the original 1993 25-Year Plan. A detailed discussion of impacts to water resources resulting from work associated with the 25-Year Plan can be found in Section 4.0, pages 8-10 of the Blair Lakes Range EA.

4.2 Biological Resources

4.2.1 Vegetation

4.2.1.1 Proposed Action

Placement of fill for road and heliport construction would eliminate approximately 0.6 acres of previously undisturbed wetland vegetation.

4.2.1.2 Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would result in no additional filling of land and impacts to vegetation would not occur.

4.2.1.3 Alternative 2

Impacts to vegetation resulting from this alternative would be similar to those discussed for Proposed Action, but reduced by 0.37 acres with the collocation of the heliport with the existing airstrip.

4.2.1.4 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would result in no additional work being done at Blair Lakes and, therefore, no additional impacts to vegetation would occur. All work

proposed in the 1993 25-Year Plan would still be implemented, as would modifications that were addressed in the 1999 Blair Lakes Improvement EA.

4.2.2 Wildlife

4.2.2.1 Proposed Action

4.2.2.1.1 Wildlife habitat in the vicinity of the range has, to a large extent, been enhanced by Blair Lakes Range activities. This is due to the hydro-axing and mowing of vegetation that is done to maintain target visibility. Mowed and hydro-axed vegetation provides preferred browse for moose, as well as, feeding habitat for snowshoe hare and fox. Due to the abundance of habitat in the area, the small portion that has been filled by construction of facilities has not caused a population level impact, merely a displacement to adjacent habitat. The activities associated with the Proposed Action would likely have similar displacing impacts to wildlife.

4.2.2.1.2 There has been localized impacts to wetlands resulting in some loss of bird and waterfowl nesting and brood-rearing habitat. Gravel extraction has resulted in some larger open water areas, but due to the pit's steep shoreline configuration, only limited waterfowl resting use has occurred. This is done by design to discourage bird and waterfowl use of the area due to the concern over bird aircraft safety hazards from flying birds.

4.2.2.2 Alternative 1

Impacts associated with Alternative 1 would be similar to those anticipated with the Proposed Action, but to a lesser extent since no new areas of undisturbed habitat would be affected.

4.2.2.3 Alternative 2

Impacts to wildlife resulting from this alternative would be similar to the Proposed Action. The amount of undisturbed wetlands affected by this alternative would be 0.37 acres less the Proposed Action.

4.2.2.4 No Action Alternative

Although no additional impacts to wildlife resources would result from the No Action Alternative, work authorized in 1994 and 1999 as part of the 25-Year Plan and subsequent revisions, would still be completed. Most of this work would have an overall beneficial effect on wildlife resources as it would reduce future impacts and restore disrupted hydrology that has resulted over the years from operation of Blair Lakes Bombing Range.

4.2.3 Fishery Resources

4.2.3.1 Proposed Action

The only identified fish stream in the immediate facility area is an unnamed tributary of Clear Creek. The ADF&G has catalogued this stream as having a resident grayling population; however, observations by Range personnel indicate no fish have been caught in the stream. Eielson AFB has constructed one bridge crossing of the Clear Creek tributary, and a second one is planned. In the past, prior to the implementation of the 25-Year Plan, impacts to fishery resources resulted from vehicle traffic doing low water crossings of this tributary. Since the road and stream upgrades have been undertaken, impacts to fish streams have been avoided. The activities proposed, as part of this alternative, would not directly impact existing fishery resources. All road construction would incorporate culverts to ensure that existing natural drainage is maintained.

4.2.3.2 Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would like not result in any direct impacts to fishery resources at the Blair Lakes Range.

4.2.3.3 Alternative 2

No impacts to fishery resources would likely result from implementation of this alternative.

4.2.4 Endangered Species

None of the alternatives considered in this EA will have an impact on any listed Endangered Species.

4.3 Cultural Resources

Impacts on identified cultural resources in the Blair Lakes Range have, to date, not occurred. Due to the remoteness of these sites, public activities have also not resulted in any alteration of these resources. Future activities, as proposed in any of the alternatives presented in this EA, would also not likely impact these resources as the sites are well documented and are being managed under the auspices of the U.S. Army's Historic Preservation Plan. In the event a cultural resource was found during construction or routine range operations, activities that might impact the resource would cease until a professional archeologist was brought in to evaluate the find.

4.4 Recreational Resources

All lands encompassed by the Exclusive Use Area are inaccessible to nonmilitary activities. When the Blair Lakes Range was first proposed and constructed, public concern was raised by outdoor recreation organizations that some high quality recreational areas would be off limits to public use, this has not proven to be the case. The no-trespass area of Blair Lakes Range (33,964 acres) is a very small portion of the Tanana Flats region and does not contain high quality fishing and hunting lands. There are reported to be good populations of moose in the area, but this is more because of the Air Force presence on the range than through natural values. The 3,000-acre area which the Air Force hydro-axes provides superior quality browse to animals in the vicinity; however, if this area were not maintained in this condition, the habitat would not be any higher quality than adjacent tracts for which access has not been impacted. None of the alternatives considered in this EA would have an impact on recreation that has not already occurred through the original land withdrawal of the bombing range.

4.5 Subsistence

As discussed in Section 3.5, the area encompassed by the Blair Lakes Range was in an area that was potentially utilized by two bands of Indians, the Chena and the Salcha. The Salcha group no longer exists as a discreet band and the Chena group only used the area on an occasional basis. Since subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, berry picking, or farming are prohibited within the Blair Lakes Range, there may have been some loss of traditional use of the area, albeit minimal.

4.6 Air Quality

All alternatives that are considered in this EA would have minor and very localized air quality impacts during construction due to fugitive dust and machinery exhaust. During the time that Eielson AFB aircraft are using the training facility, temporary impacts from aircraft jet emissions also occurs.

4.7 Unavoidable Adverse Effects

The unavoidable adverse impacts for the Proposed Action would include loss of wetlands and vegetative communities resulting from placement of gravel fill, construction of facilities; and potentially an occasional small (temporary) release of fuel or other contaminants from normal construction and operational activities. None of these impacts are individually or cumulatively significant, and most of them are of a temporary nature. The Proposed Action and Alternative 2 would have unavoidable impacts associated with construction of the pad and road. The No Action Alternative would have no additional unavoidable adverse impacts.

4.8 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

There are very few aspects of either the Proposed Action or Alternative 1 and 2 that would be considered irreversible or irretrievable. The obvious ones, however, are those related to the extraction of gravel and its use as material for construction of the road and pads. The mining of the gravel is an irreplaceable resource once it has been removed. It would, to a degree, be retrievable upon closure of the facility. The vegetation lost or altered by the removal of gravel and its placement in wetlands would be an irreversible commitment of wetlands. Man has developed a limited ability to restore wetlands by removing fill and reestablishing wetlands vegetation and hydrology, but it would likely not be considered justified for these areas due to the low-value and limited uniqueness attributed to these kinds of wetlands (black spruce, scrub/shrub).

4.9 Relationship of Short-Term Uses and Long-Term Productivity

The short-term use of the improvements of the Blair Lakes Facility is important to the efficient operation of the bombing range. The range itself, is a critical training facility for Air Force aircraft and important to the mission of Eielson AFB. When weighed against the long-term productivity of the area impacted by the facility's operation, maintenance of its current status seems reasonable. This is mainly due to the fact that the habitat quality of the area encompassed by Blair Lakes is relatively low. It is almost exclusively comprised of black spruce, scrub/shrub wetlands, which is representative of the single most prevalent habitat type found in Interior Alaska.

4.10 Cumulative Impacts

The National Environmental Policy Act process requires that the issue of cumulative impacts be addressed in an environmental assessment.

4.10.1 The Council on Environmental Quality has stated in their NEPA regulations (1508.7) that: "Cumulative impact is the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions..." and "...can result from individually minor, but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time." Eielson AFB has, over the years been very cognizant of the issue of cumulative impacts to wetlands. This is due to the fact that the base was, to a large extent, built by filling wetlands, and that expansion of Eielson AFB facilities beyond the original footprint of the base often requires the use of additional wetlands. Of the remaining undeveloped acres that constitute Eielson AFB base lands, 79 percent are designated wetlands.

4.10.2 On a regional basis, Air Force impacts to the environment in the Ft. Wainwright Military Training Area (MTA) are quite localized and are not cumulatively significant. The maintenance of the Blair Lakes Range and its

associated access roads are typical of the kind of activities that the Air Force conducts as part of their military exercises. Relative to the total acreage that comprises the MTA (642,215 acres), the total number of acres that have been even minimally impacted by the Air Force for range related activities, is insignificant (estimated acreage = 428 acres). Most of this acreage will, once Air Force activities are discontinued, revert back to a relatively natural condition. This will be achieved through a combination of active rehabilitation and natural revegetation of a given facility/site.

4.11 Environmental Justice

4.11.1 Executive Order 12898, *Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*, was issued by President Clinton on February 11, 1994. Objectives of the EO, as it pertains to the NEPA process, requires federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. To accomplish these requirements the Air Force must conduct an environmental justice analysis of all potential impacts that may result from the proposed actions.

4.11.2 The environmental justice analysis must first identify all adverse impacts associated with the project. The next phase is to delineate the potential area of impact for the resources affected. If, within this area of impact, population demographics are such that a disproportionate effect on minority or low-income populations may occur, it should be so identified. These impacts should be documented and mitigation should be developed that can be implemented by the Air Force.

4.11.3 The Air Force's Land Use Permit from the U.S. Army provides them exclusive use of a 33,963 acre portion of the tract, designated R-2211, and joint use with the U.S. Army of the remaining 29,137 acres for a total tract size of 63,100 acres. Blair Lakes is centrally located in this tract. As stated previously, the entire tract is restricted from nonmilitary use and the closest population/residences to this area is along the Tanana River, 15.2 miles east. This residential area does not exhibit characteristics of low-income or minority populations that are not exhibited in the Fairbanks population as a whole.

4.11.4 Based on the environmental impacts identified in this EA and on a corresponding environmental justice analysis, it is felt that no disproportionate impact to minority or low-income populations would occur from implementation of this project.

4.12 Mitigation

No mitigation was recommended or required by any state or federal agencies for any aspect of the proposed work.

5.0 Glossary

Borrow Pit – A specific location where gravel or other fill is removed for use at another site.

Detritus – Loose organic material that results from disintegration of parent material.

Erosion – The wearing away of soil or organic matter by flowing water.

Hydro-axe – A large tracked or wheeled machine with a heavy-duty mower attachment capable of removing standing trees and shrubs.

Inert – A projectile with similar ballistics, but not containing the same explosive charge as its live counterpart. Inert bombs may still have an explosive smoke spotting charge.

Mitigate – To reduce or negate the effects of an environmental disturbance.

Ordnance – Military supplies including weapons, ammunition, combat vehicles, and maintenance tools and equipment.

Permafrost – Permanently frozen subsoil.

Physiographic – A region containing the same general natural characteristics.

Ponding – Depressions resulting from the settling or removal of soil which fill with water from the surrounding saturated soils.

Subsidence – The shrinking of soils when they thaw, often results in ponding.

Succession – Change in the composition of an ecosystem as the available competing organisms, especially plants, respond to and modify the environment.

Target Array – Plastic, wood, or metal representations of enemy forces, personnel, facilities, or equipment in a specific situation, accompanied by target analysis sensors.

Thermokarst – Lakes, bogs, caverns, pits, or other usually water-filled depressions found in permafrost regions resulting from the melting of ground ice.

Tundra – Low-growing vegetation that exist beyond the temperature limitations of tree growth, either because of high latitudes or high altitudes.

Unexploded Ordnance – Live ordnance that did not explode on impact, or practice ordnance in which the smoke spotting charge did not explode on impact.

Wetlands – Areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions.

6.0 List of Preparers, Persons, and Agencies Consulted

6.1 Preparer

Sarah Conn, Alaska Caledonia-Environmental Services, Ester, AK,
ph: 907-474-8234.

6.2 Persons and Agencies Consulted

Mr. James Nolke, 354th Civil Engineer Squadron, 354 CES/CEVP, Eielson AFB,
ph: 377-3365.

Mr. Tom Slater, 354th Civil Engineer Squadron, 354 CES/CEVN, Eielson AFB,
ph: 377-5182.

Mr. Gerald Von Rueden, 354th Civil Engineer Squadron, 354 CES/CEVN,
Eielson AFB, ph: 377-5182

Ms. Newman, US Army Corps of Engineers, Regulatory Functions Branch,
Fairbanks, AK, ph: 474-2166

7.0 Wetlands Permit



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT, ALASKA
3437 AIRPORT WAY
SUITE 206 WASHINGTON PLAZA
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA 99709-4777

Regulatory Branch (1145b)
North Section

PERMITTEE: United States Air Force, Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska
EFFECTIVE DATE: November 14, 2002
REFERENCE NO.: Q-1993-0496
Clear Creek 4

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
PERMIT MODIFICATION

Department of the Army permit number P-930496, Clear Creek 4, was issued to the United States Air Force, Eielson Air Force Base on April 13, 2001, to: place approximately 589,699 cubic yards of fill material through the removal of vegetative debris and leveling of 548 acres of waters of the United States, including wetlands; temporarily store approximately 221,027 cubic yards of vegetative debris until disposal of all vegetative debris in an old borrow pit on site previously authorized under DA permit 4-910478, Willow Creek 5; and place approximately 8,219 cubic yards of clean soil fill into approximately 9.3 acres of waters of the United States, including wetlands, to construct two lead in lights maintenance roads (900' long x 35' wide x 4' high), each with a turnaround (66' circular base x 4' high). To facilitate the construction of the roads, the creation of four temporary turnarounds was authorized (28' long x 28' wide x 4' high). Additionally, in the event of a fuel spill, up to 200 cubic yards of petroleum contaminated soil over the previously authorized clean soil fill on the existing airstrip (airstrip was authorized under 4-930496, Clear Creek 4, and is 3500' long x 120' wide x 4' high) may be spread, provided that both the U.S. Army and State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation give approval for this disposal method prior to the placement of any contaminated fill.

The permit is hereby modified as follows: Place approximately 2,820 cubic yards of fill material into approximately 0.60 acres of wetlands to construct a new haul road (705' l x 35' w).

All work will be performed in accordance with plans, twenty one (21) pages, dated 12 November 2002.

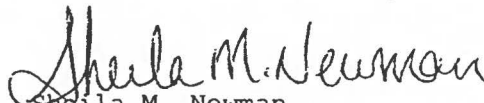
The time limit for completing the work authorized ends on November 30, 2005. If you find that you need more time to complete the authorized activity, submit your request for a time extension to this office for consideration at least one month before the above date is reached.

All other conditions under which the subject authorization was made remain in full force and effect.

If the activity authorized herein is not completed within three (3) years of the date of this letter, the authorization of this modification; if not previously revoked or specifically extended, shall automatically expire.

This authorization and the enclosed modified plans should be attached to the original permit. Also enclosed is a Notice of Authorization that should be posted in a prominent location near the authorized work.

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:


Sheila M. Newman
Acting Field Office Manager

Enclosures